

Veterans Corner  
October 2008  
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### VA Secretary establishes ALS as a presumptive Compensable Illness

Veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) may receive badly needed support for themselves and their families after the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that ALS will become a presumptively compensable illness for all veterans with 90 days or more of continuously active service in the military.

“Veterans are developing ALS in rates higher than the general population, and it was appropriate to take action,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake said. Secretary Peake based his decision primarily on a November 2006 report by the national Academy of Sciences’ Institute of medicine (IOM) on the association between active-duty service and ALS.

The new interim final regulation applies to all applications for benefits received by VA on or after September 23, 2008, or that are pending before VA, the United States Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, or the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit on that date.

VA will work to identify and contact veterans with ALS, including those whose claims for ALS were previously denied, through direct mailings and other outreach programs.

To view the entire regulation in the Federal Register go to:

[www.federalregister.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2008-21998PI.pdf](http://www.federalregister.gov/OFRUpload/OFRData/2008-21998PI.pdf)

To file a claim for ALS contact the Saratoga County Veterans Service Agency at 518-884-4115.

### New VA Rules for Adapted Housing Grants

A change in the law that allows certain seriously injured veterans and service members to receive multiple grants for constructing or modifying homes has resulted in many new grants, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

Before the change, eligible veterans and service members could receive special adaptive housing grants of \$10,000 or \$50,000 from VA only once. Now they may use the benefit up to three times, so long as the total grants stay within specified limits outlined in the law.

“Veterans seriously disabled during their military service have earned this benefit,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “This change ensured that every eligible veteran and service member has the chance to use the maximum amount afforded to them by our grateful nation.”

In order to ensure all previous recipients are aware of this opportunity, VA has mailed more than 16,000 letters to eligible veterans, reaching out to those who used only a portion of their grant or who decided not to use the grant even after initially qualifying.

#### VA announces \$36 million homeless programs

Homeless veterans in 35 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico will get more assistance, thanks to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) grants providing \$36.7 million to community groups to create 1,526 beds for homeless veterans this year.

“These grants provide a helping hand to veterans who have served out nation in uniform,” said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Dr. James B. Peake. “Our partnerships with community-based organizations provide safe, temporary housing while these veterans return to productive lives.”

VA has identified public and community non-profit groups eligible to receive payments for housing and supportive services to homeless veterans, including 49 grants for vans that will transport homeless veterans to health care and training programs.

The grants are part of VA’s continuing efforts to reduce homelessness among veterans. VA has the largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs in the country. In many cities and rural areas, VA social workers and other clinicians working with community and faith-based partners conduct extensive outreach programs, clinical assessments, medical treatments, alcohol and drug abuse counseling and employment assistance.

For more information about VA’s homeless programs go to <http://www.va.gov/homeless>

#### New GI Bill Worth \$80,000

Its free, its worth about twice what it was before and its now law. The new GI bill-signed by president Bush on June 30 – will go into effect August 1, 2009, and its supporters hope it will offer Iraq and Afghanistan vets the same boost to their civilian lives as its landmark WWII-era predecessor.

“We began with the simple concept that those who have been serving since 9/11 should have the same opportunity for a first-class educational future as those who served during WWII,” said Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.), who proposed the original legislation in 2007.

The new GI bill’s enactment was “a tremendous victory for America’s veterans, military and their families.” The new law repeals the old Montgomery GI bills \$1,200 enrollment fee, but most important, the new GI Bill will cover the entire cost of obtaining a four-year college degree.

It will provide the amount of the most expensive in-state tuition at a public college within a veteran’s home state, a monthly living stipend and an annual book allowance.

According to the Army Times, these fees – which will vary widely based on the veteran's location – will average about \$1450 monthly for tuition, \$1,100 monthly for the stipend and \$1,000 annually for books.

The Army Times noted that the total four-year benefit will average some \$80,000 – about double the current value – for a veteran who served 36 months. The new GI Bill is expected to cost some \$63 billion.

The monthly living stipend is based on the military's basic allowance for housing for an E-5 with dependents. Vets will get up to 15 years after separation – five more than under the Montgomery GI Bill – to use the new benefits.

According to VA, the housing allowance and books and supplies stipend are not payable to individuals on active duty.

If a veterans who has fulfilled his or her full three-year active duty commitment opts to attend a private school, the school and VA may enter into an agreement to cover additional expenses. Under the Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement option, VA and the school would match funds to cover the difference between the highest in-state public college cost and the higher private tuition. For more information call the VA Education Department at 1-888-442-4551.

#### Free Car wash for Veterans

For the fourth consecutive year Hoffman's Car Wash is inviting all active duty and former members of the military to have their vehicle (or vehicles) washed free of charge on Veterans Day, Tuesday November 11<sup>th</sup>. It is their way of thanking these men and women for the sacrifices that they have made in service to our country.

The only requirement is that the person coming through the car wash let the employees know that they are either active duty or former military. There is no need to show any type of identification – they will take you at your word. If you have more than one vehicle you are more than welcome to come back again. Last year Hoffman's Car Wash had the privilege to wash over 1700 vehicles belonging to veterans and would like to wash more this year.